

CHICAGO JEWISH History

Rosa:

The Editor of The American Jewess Helped Put Chicago on the Map of Jewish Feminism, Joined Herzl as a Founder of World Zionism, and Won Attention for Her Outspoken Editorials; Then, in 1899, She Mysteriously Dropped Out of Sight for Three Decades

By Walter Roth

For the last four years of the 19th century, Rosa Sonneschein of Chicago made herself into one of the world's leading Zionists and leading Jewish feminists. As publisher of what she described as the first magazine dedicated to the interests of Jewish women, as a delegate to the First Zionist Conference, as a friend of Theodore Herzl, and as a divorced woman active in the male world, she became a celebrity within the Jewish world.

Living in Chicago and publishing a magazine distributed around the world, Rosa became an outspoken social figure adding to the city's reputation as a center of world Jewish feminism. Less prominent than National Conference of Jewish Women founder Hannah Solomon, also a Chicagoan, Rosa had nevertheless become, at the prime of her life, an apparently entrenched leader of the world's Jewish women for decades to come.

And then, at least for public purposes, she all but vanished as the twentieth century began.

* * *

Rosa was born in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire on March 12, 1847. Her father, Rabbi Hirsch Baer-Fassel, was a wealthy, prominent rabbi in Moravia. He was a great orator and scientist who

continued on page 4

Video Debut Overflows Historical Society

The May 18 premiere of the Society's *Romance of a People: The First 100 Years of Jewish History in Chicago, 1833-1933* proved to be one of the most successful Society events in our twenty-year history.

The event filled the Arthur Rubloff Auditorium of the Chicago Historical Society, with a capacity of 440, and at least 150 additional

continued on page 3

Inside:

- Photo from the Archives Helps Tell POW's Story
- Oral History Excerpt of Harriet Gerber Lewis
- Photos from Premiere of *Romance of a People*
- Sam Becker Tells of Chicago Day Race Victory

President's Column

When we previewed our recent film production *Romance of a People* at the main auditorium of the Chicago Historical Society on Sunday afternoon, May 18, 1997, we were overwhelmed with the crowd of people who showed up for the event.



Walter Roth

We had asked the Historical Society to do an extra showing of the film in case of an over capacity crowd, but unfortunately, they were unable to meet our request.

As it turned out, several hundred persons could not be accommodated, even though nearly 500 viewers were seated for the showing. Obviously our success was marred by the inconvenience caused to persons who could not join us for the event even though they had taken the time to travel to the Historical Society.

In any event, we apologize for the inconvenience caused to those not able to find seats and hope this will

not deter them from joining us for coming events.

The film was also shown to Chicagoans on Channel 11 for three viewings after the initial screening and is now available for purchase from ERGO Productions (800-695-ERGO).

As you may recall, the film, *Romance of People*, depicts the first 100 years of Jewish life in Chicago.

Many, if not most, of the persons who lived that history have passed away and their stories are told by their relatives or by historians who have researched this early period of Chicago history.

In order to continue our projects on Chicago history, it is now urgent that we turn our attention once again to the one means readily available to preserve this history — and that is the taking of oral histories.

Oral histories, whether by video-taping, audio-taping, or written transcripts are a powerful means of fleshing out the social life of the times.

They make it possible to recall

the lives of our parents and grandparents and how they dealt with their problems and successes. It is their way of passing their experiences down to us and those who come after us.

Our Board of Directors will soon meet to discuss our projects for the coming year.

One of our major projects will be to plan some workshops to train our members to participate in our oral history projects. We hope by this means to expand our library of existing oral histories in order to create films and books for the future benefit of our people.

I would like to encourage some of you who have not yet participated in our oral history program to consider joining us for our training workshops and in planning out our work on oral histories for the coming years.

The stories we recover and preserve through that process will no doubt be compelling in their own right, and may well prove to be some of the documents our descendants use to prepare the sequel to *Romance of a People*.

In the meantime, on behalf of myself and our entire Board of Directors, I wish you a continued sunny (and, I hope, not too hot) summer. □

Minsky Winner Alex Goldman to Speak at Next Meeting

Rabbi Alex Goldman, author of *My Father, Myself: A Son's Memoir of his Father, Rabbi Yehuda D. Goldman*, will speak at the next open meeting of the Society, September 21, at Bederman Auditorium of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

Goldman, one of America's best-known rabbis and the author as well of *Giants of the Faith*, a book of brief biographies of many of America's leading rabbis, was raised on

Chicago's South Side.

Goldman's father, Yehuda, was a rabbi in Chicago for decades, and at one time was known as the oldest practicing rabbi in America.

Goldman's joint memoir of himself and his father won the 1996 Doris Minsky Memorial Award given annually to a manuscript dealing with an unexplored aspect of Chicago's Jewish history.

Judging is carried out by a committee comprised of members of the Society's board of directors.

The prize carries a \$1000 stipend as well as publication. All Society members will receive copies of the

memoir when it is ready for release, some time in the fall of 1997.

For information on the 1997 Minsky Award competition should contact the Society at (312)663-5634.

In his upcoming talk, Goldman will discuss recollections of his father and his own career as well as his thoughts on the unusual dual biography he has written.

The Society's regular meetings are open to Society members and their guests. There is no fee for admission.

The talk begins at 2 p.m., with a social hour starting at 1 p.m. Spertus Institute is located at 618 S. Michigan Ave. □

Premiere

continued from page one

people had to be turned away for lack of space.

The premiere marked the culmination of a more than three-year effort on the part of the Society to produce the video history, and it featured a panel discussion with several of the people responsible for it.

With former Chicago Alderman Leon Despres serving as moderator, the panel featured Society President Walter Roth, Past President Dr. Adele Hast, long-time board member Charles Bernstein, video director Beverly Siegel, and Dr. June Sochen, Northeastern Illinois University professor of history.

The Society first began planning the video project in 1994, with the Board discussing a series of possible directions for it.

After reviewing the work of several local film-makers, the Board chose Siegel to handle the project.

In turn, Siegel wrote a script with input from several Board members, directed shooting of the film, and

helped line up support from the Illinois Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Illinois General Assembly.

The final 30-minute film represents countless hours of research on the part of Society members and other experts of Chicago Jewish history. It also reflects dozens of hours of actual shooting and much more time spent in preparations.

The packed crowd at the video premiere was treated first to a screening of the video and then to the panel discussion.

Members of the audience themselves reflected a great deal of the history that the video recorded. [See photos on pages 8-9.]

Many attendees had first-hand recollections of Chicago Day at the 1933 World's Fair. Original film of that event — unseen for decades and uncovered by Siegel in federal archives — constitutes one of the highlights of the video.

In addition, several people brought their children and grandchildren to help add pictures to

stories they had been telling for years about local history.

Chicago Historical Society President Douglas Greenberg welcomed the crowd on behalf of the Historical Society.

Although uninvolved in producing the video, the Historical Society was a co-sponsor of the premiere, providing the room and agreeing to waive the usual admission fee to its museum for people attending the premiere.

The unprecedented success of the program did not come without a price, however.

Members of the overflow crowd, many of whom arrived on time for the event but too late to find seating, were disappointed.

"We are sympathetic to everyone who could not be accommodated," Society President Roth said. "We hoped for a large crowd, and we certainly got it. We just couldn't arrange for a second showing."

The overall success of the program nevertheless proved inspirational, leading Society members and guests to imagine future projects.

As Despres concluded, "We'll see you all again in 50 years." □

Board Members Handle Overflow Premiere Crowd

While the premiere of *Romance of a People* attracted a large crowd of Society members, Chicago Historical Society members, and guests of both groups, a handful of Society board

members found themselves outside the auditorium dealing with the overflow crowd of disappointed attendees.

Morene Dunn, whose publicity helped draw the large crowd, Dr. Albert Erlebacher, and former board member Mark Mandle bore the brunt of the unpleasant job of having to turn interested guests away.

Dunn's quick thinking helped turn lemons into lemonade, however, as

she improvised a sales booth and worked with Erlebacher and Mandle to sell 60 copies of the video as well as several memberships in the Society.

All three board members were forced to miss the panel discussion and the video premiere but their efforts helped the Society convert a potentially embarrassing shortage of space into an opportunity to promote the Society and the work we do. □

Copies of *Romance of a People* Video Available for Sale

Did you miss the premiere of the Society's new video history of the first 100 years of Jewish history in Chicago?

Did you attend the event and leave

wanting to share the experience with others you know care about Chicago Jewish history?

Now you can own your own copies of the video and offer them as gifts to friends and family.

Copies of the video are available for sale at local Jewish bookstores, the Chicago Historical Society, and through mail order from the Ergo Home Video of New Jersey.

The video costs \$29.95 plus \$5 for shipping and handling.

Society members are entitled to a discount price of \$24.95 for one copy of the video only; after that they can purchase unlimited copies at the regular price.

Ergo Home Video can be reached at P.O. Box 2037, Teaneck, NJ, 07666, or by phone at (800) 695-ERGO (3746). □

Rosa

continued from page one

introduced many religious reforms to his congregants. He was well known for preaching in German rather than in the more common Yiddish.

Rabbi Baer-Fassel lived in sumptuous homes in various localities. He maintained a grand library and a salon frequented by intellectuals, business leaders, and professionals.

Rosa's mother died when Rosa was very young, and Rabbi Baer-Fassel remarried a woman with several children much older than Rosa. As his youngest child, Rosa received the lion's share of her father's attention and overheard the brilliant discussions of her parents' salon.

As historian Jack N. Porter put it, "by the time she was in her teens, she had absorbed the education that in those days would have been remarkable for a male twice her age."

Apparently, Rabbi Baer-Fassel gave his beloved daughter a further indulgence. Instead of picking a mate for Rosa as was the custom, he permitted her to reject the first two marriage proposals she received when she was sixteen, but insisted that she accept the third.

Years later, Rosa would state that the third choice was a disaster.

His name was Solomon Sonneschein, a handsome and brilliant young rabbi from a neighboring village who had risen to prominence from an impoverished background.

Rosa was 17 when she married, and she and her new husband had three children in Europe and a fourth in America.

Solomon soon became well-known as a radical Reform rabbi in Prague, but he also gained a reputation for drinking and womanizing.

Rosa, Solomon, and their children left for America in 1869 when Solomon was offered a pulpit in a New York congregation.

They stayed in New York only briefly, however. Solomon was caught having an affair with a young girl whose father was a prominent businessman. He soon obtained a pulpit in St. Louis, a rather "provincial" place for an aspiring young Reform rabbi.

* * *

The family's move to St. Louis coincided with Rosa's emergence as a notable public figure in her own



Rosa Sonneschein

right. She began to write as a journalist, and she began to draw attention as a new kind of character in the American Jewish world.

Beyond her wit and sophistication, Rosa was known as a remarkably beautiful woman. The combination unsettled the mostly male circles in which she had begun to travel.

Rabbi Jacob R. Marcus, the late dean of American Jewish historians, reports hearing from a participant at the Philadelphia Conference of Reform Rabbis in 1869 that when Rosa "strode in the assembly room, full of rabbis, in all her extravagance, looking like nothing so much as a Jewish Carmen, all eyes turned to her and conversation stopped."

Rosa seems to have appreciated the effect she produced; she reportedly exercised every morning to keep her figure trim and smoked little "Between the Acts" cigars which were popular with young men at the time.

In 1878, her profile rose even higher after a series of articles she wrote for the great Paris Exposition of that year.

Because she was so well-known through her

writings, her salon activities, and her physical presence, she was invited to address the press conference at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Her main theme was the need for a new type of literary magazine which would cover the broad spectrum of events that would interest women.

During her same visit to Chicago, she attended the World Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair of 1893 and witnessed the founding of the National Conference of Jewish Women whose first President was Hannah Solomon.

Rosa seems to have recognized Chicago as a place that would afford her the opportunity to explore and pursue what it meant to be a Jewish woman. She would spend most of the rest of the 19th century living here.

* * *

By the time of the World's Fair, Rosa had determined to divorce her husband. While Solomon had gained some fame in the Reform movement, he had also achieved notoriety for his drinking and philandering.

After the divorce, Rosa set out to raise money to establish a magazine along the lines she had described in her 1893 address. The result was *The American Jewess*, launched in Chicago in April, 1895.

In the first issues of the monthly magazine, Rosa managed to attract well-known contributors: both men and women.

From the articles and the general makeup of the magazine, it is clear that Rosa was counting on the middle and upper classes of established German-Jewish women for readership. This idea is supported by the fact that she lived – at least during 1896 – at 3756 S. Ellis Avenue in a neighborhood where many middle-class German Jews lived.

Early in her editorial tenure, Rosa traveled to Europe to cover and help publicize the case of Alfred Dreyfus, a French army captain accused of treason for what would prove to be false and anti-Semitic reasons. Her reports proved to be among the earliest American publicity on the Dreyfus affair.

During the same trip abroad, Rosa was reintroduced to a fellow journalist. Theodore Herzl was covering the Dreyfus affair for a Viennese newspaper for which Rosa's nephew worked as well. Herzl's outrage at Dreyfus's treatment helped convince him that Jews

would continue to be subject to anti-Semitism until they managed to establish their own nation.

When Rosa returned to Chicago, she published a moving appeal by Dreyfus's wife calling on the Pope to intervene in this miscarriage of justice.

Because of her association with Herzl, she also became a strong exponent of Zionism, a position not at all popular with much of Reform Judaism and one violently opposed by most American Reform Rabbis, particularly her former husband.

* * *

Rosa was at the height of her journalistic career in the summer of 1897 when Herzl issued his historic call for the First Zionist Conference held in Basel, Switzerland.

She was one of thirteen women participants, and she

is featured in a famous poster of the 1897 delegates to the Zionist Conference, a copy of which is reproduced in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. As a sign of the times, the pictures of the few women participants were all placed in the

bottom row of the poster.

If Rosa's participation earned little public notice, however, it clearly affected Herzl. In his diary on the conference, Rosa is the only American participant he mentions. In his account, Rosa came to him on the eve of the first meeting of the conference and said, "They'll crucify you and I'll be your Magdalene."

When Rosa returned from Basel, she wrote glowingly about Herzl, his associate Max Nordau, and the conference as a whole, but she did have a number of complaints. She noted that the conference had been conducted in an utterly non-religious manner – the participants had not even spoken an opening prayer.

In addition, she complained that women had not been given the right to vote on any issue. In her editorials on the subject, she blamed East European Jews, asserting that Zionist leadership had yielded to the custom of Eastern Jews to treat women as having inferior status in religious matters.

* * *

The American Jewess prospered for two more years and continued to feature leading writers. A few article titles from the period suggest the tenor of the magazine: "The Successful Businesswoman," "Single Women," "Cycling as an Exercise for Women," and "Women and

Rosa "strode in the assembly room, full of rabbis, in all her extravagance, looking like nothing so much as a Jewish Carmen, all eyes turned to her and conversation stopped."

the Law.”

In addition to such articles, Rosa wrote many editorials under her own name. She urged women to lobby for equality in education and to contribute their efforts to building better communities.

At the same time, Rosa urged women to heed their obligations to the family, to be “saintly” mothers and wives, and to try to serve as the “keeper of religious tradition, a bulwark against anti-Semitism, and the conscience of synagogue and Jewish community life.”

She continually opposed the Reform movement for embracing the Sunday “Sabbath,” and she criticized the National Council of Jewish Women and Hannah Solomon for its policy of non-observance of the Jewish Sabbath.

In Chicago, Rosa repeatedly called for equality for women in the temple. She obtained the support of Rabbi Emil Hirsch of Sinai Congregation, the foremost leader of the Reform movement in Chicago, and urged him to permit single women to become members of Reform congregations.

She called as well for women to be permitted to speak from the pulpit, something Hirsch apparently supported as well.

It is hard to know what role Rosa’s efforts played, but Temple Isaiah, another leading Chicago Reform congregation, did announce in 1898 that it had agreed to admit women to full, independent membership for ten dollars a year.

Throughout the run of *The American Jewess*, Rosa embraced an eclectic range of positions. She was a Reform Jew who championed Zionism; an advocate of feminism who also believed that women’s first priority was the family, not politics; and a liberal advocate for Jewish rights who could, nevertheless, not broaden her vision to protest racial discrimination against blacks.

* * *

Above all, Rosa was a dynamic and dramatic figure in Chicago and world Jewish life.

When *The American Jewess* folded in 1899 as the combined result of dwindling circulation and the inability of her backers to raise more money, Rosa was 52 years old and in apparent good health. She would live for 33 more years, but for most of them she would be a silent and forgotten figure.

Returning to St. Louis, she lived quietly until March 5, 1932, and she is buried in the Har Sinai cemetery.

Until recently, Rosa’s eclipse seemed an insoluble mystery. In the middle 1980s, however, her grandson, David Loth, reported that he had taken oral histories from her and learned that she had begun to lose her hearing even at the peak of her journalistic career.

Within a few years of her magazine’s demise, Rosa was completely deaf.

Deprived of her ability to converse with others, “her pen ran dry.” She did apparently travel often to Europe to be with her friends and family, but she was no longer able to take part in public affairs.

One of the most brilliant women of her era, she found herself unable to learn or share the details of what was happening in the world.

* * *

For a few years in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Rosa’s pen had dealt with two great issues that would grip the American Jewish world in the twentieth century: the American Jewish relationship to Zionism and the effect of feminism on Judaism.

She could not embrace all of the modern goals of feminism. She identified with middle and upper classes exclusively, and seemed to have little understanding of women who were not from her own German-Austrian background. Except for her embracing of Zionism, she did not deeply involve herself in political issues.

Even her reputation fell into rapid decline. When H.L. Meites compiled his encyclopedic *History of the Jews of Chicago* in 1924, Rosa failed to merit a single mention. Little has been written about her in the last century.

For the the last decade of the last century, however, she made a substantial contribution to the future course of feminism by calling for women’s equality in Jewish religious rituals and in communal and philanthropic activities.

Her eventual decline into silence is tragic, but her contributions to world Judaism and to Chicago’s place as a capital of Jewish thinking make her someone whose memory and accomplishments are worth commemorating. □

Rosa embraced an eclectic range of positions. She was a Reform Jew who championed Zionism; an advocate of feminism who also believed that women’s first priority was the family, not politics; and a liberal advocate for Jewish rights who could not broaden her vision to protest racial discrimination against blacks.

The American Jewess Bids America a Spiteful Farewell

The following is an editorial published in the final edition of The American Jewess, Volume VIII, Number 5, August 1899. While it hints at the physical difficulties that had fallen upon Rosa Sonneschein, it does not name them, nor her.

With this issue of *The American Jewess* this magazine will cease to appear. Conventionality demands that we should say, "It is with extreme reluctance and grief that we announce, &c.," but that would be only conventionality, not truth. Of course, we hesitated a long time before we took this drastic step, but once determined, our action is prompt and decisive.

The American Jewess came into the literary arena because it thought that it had a mission to fulfill; it was believed that a good, wholesome magazine devoted to Jewish affairs, particularly those of most interest to the enlightened Jewish woman, would be received cordially, and would live for a long, long time. True, its early reception was very pleasing, but many were its vicissitudes; now the sunlight of prosperity smiled upon it, and ever and anon the dark clouds of adversity engulfed it. It struggled valiantly, not willing to give up while there was hope left. A noble woman, devoted to the Jewish cause and to her sisters, gave up some of the best years of her life to make the magazine a success, but she was only a woman, and her health broke down under the burden of responsibilities, and finally fell among the Philistines, into the hands of unscrupulous individuals, who traded on her name, and sapped her life blood, and the vitality of her magazine, and when they made every last dollar they could out of her and her magazine they cast her adrift.

The present publishers were then prevailed upon to take hold of the magazine on terms that were satisfactory to all parties, and devised plans that would have made the magazine the success

it deserved to be, if those who read the magazine, and sent indignant notes to the office if it did not arrive on time, had given it the proper support. It never occurred to those who sent complaints that part payment (at least) of long-due subscription would have been more appreciated. If those who subscribed for the magazine had been willing to help to the extent of paying what they owed, we would have done the rest, and it would not have taken us long to place the magazine on a paying basis. We are not scolding, we are merely giving facts.

It has been a valuable, though a sad, lesson for us. We thought that so-called "enlightened" Jews would support literature, but we were mistaken.

A noble woman, devoted to the Jewish cause and to her sisters, gave up some of the best years of her life to make the magazine a success, but she was only a woman, and her health broke down under the burden of responsibilities...

Most of them are ashamed to have their neighbors and the letter carriers know that they are interested in Jewish matters. We have often admired the pluck and candor of the "barbaric Russian" Jew, who spreads his Yiddish

paper before him on the street car, in the ferry-boat, or in the public park and reads it with the same unconcern as his neighbors who hold English papers before them. It is a travesty on culture that interest in Jewish affairs and Jewish literature should be found only in the brain of the "uncouth" Ghetto Jew, while the minds of our "cultivated" and "emancipated" Jews should be bent on getting as far away from Jewish affairs as possible.

It is this condition that makes the lot of English-Jewish journalism so precarious; it is that which makes the jargon press and literature of the Jews so prosperous. This statement is not called out merely by our sad experience with *The American Jewess*. We are thoroughly acquainted with the whole English-Jewish journalistic field, and we know that there is hardly a Jewish weekly published in English in this country that would make a profitable investment for capital. No one has ever made a fortune in that field, and no one ever will.

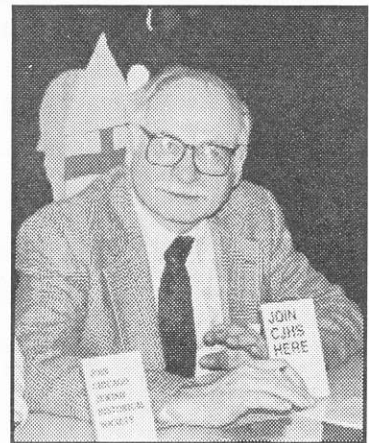
—THE PUBLISHERS.



Adele Hast, Beverly Siegel, Walter Roth, Charles B. Bernstein, and June Sochen



Walter Roth and Burt Robin



Albert Erlebacher



Adele Hast, Lorraine Moss, Norman Schwartz, Burt Robin, and Eve Levin

All Photographs by
Paula Chaiken



Beverly Siegel and Joe Kraus



Esther and Julie Chizewer

Scenes from a Premiere

The May 18 premiere of the Society's *Romance of a People: The First Hundred Years of Jewish Life in Chicago, 1833-1933* was a gala event that drew an overflow crowd to the Chicago Historical Society. The audience included members of the Society, members of the Chicago Historical Society, and guests of both. The event marked the conclusion of a more than three-year effort by the Society to produce a video history of the Jews of Chicago, and it proved a good occasion for a party bringing together many old and many new friends from across the community.



Henry J. and Charles B. Bernstein



Leon and Marian Despres



Century of Progress Race Champ Shares Story and Certificate with Society

Sam Becker, who was a member of one of the only seven Jewish families in suburban Geneva, IL in 1933, was a memorable part of the largest gathering of Chicago's Jews in history.

Becker, a member of the Jewish War Veterans, spoke recently with Society Past President Norman Schwartz about his experience as the winner of the All-Chicago 440 yard run championship at the Jewish All-Chicago Athletic Meet that was part of Jewish Day at the 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago.

A junior at Geneva Community High School and a member of the varsity track team, Becker won a race that day that attracted Jewish runners from throughout the greater Chicago area.

Becker reports that Geneva is due west of Chicago and that Roosevelt, the street along which so much of Jewish Chicago extended, runs into the suburb where it is re-named as State Street.

According to Becker, the race took place in Douglas Park and the winners were then transported to Soldier Field for the festival.

Jewish Day, the subject of an article by Walter Roth in the Spring, 1992 issue of *Chicago Jewish History*, not only brought together the largest crowd in Chicago Jewish history, but also served as the backdrop for "Romance of a People," the pageant staged by Meyer Weisgal and the inspiration for the title of the Society's video history of the first century of Jewish life in Chicago.

Recent interest by members of the Society and other historians of the area in the Jewish Day celebrations encouraged Becker to share his story and to donate the certificate he won that day to the Chicago Jewish Archives at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

We encourage other members of the Society to share memories and memorabilia they have of Jewish Day and other significant events in Chicago Jewish history with us.

We thank Becker for his generosity and for his thoughtfulness in making his experience and his award available to coming generations of historians and interested future generations. □



Sam Becker with the Geneva Community High track team

Recovered POW Photograph Helps Tell Story of Chicagoan

Joy A. Kingsolver

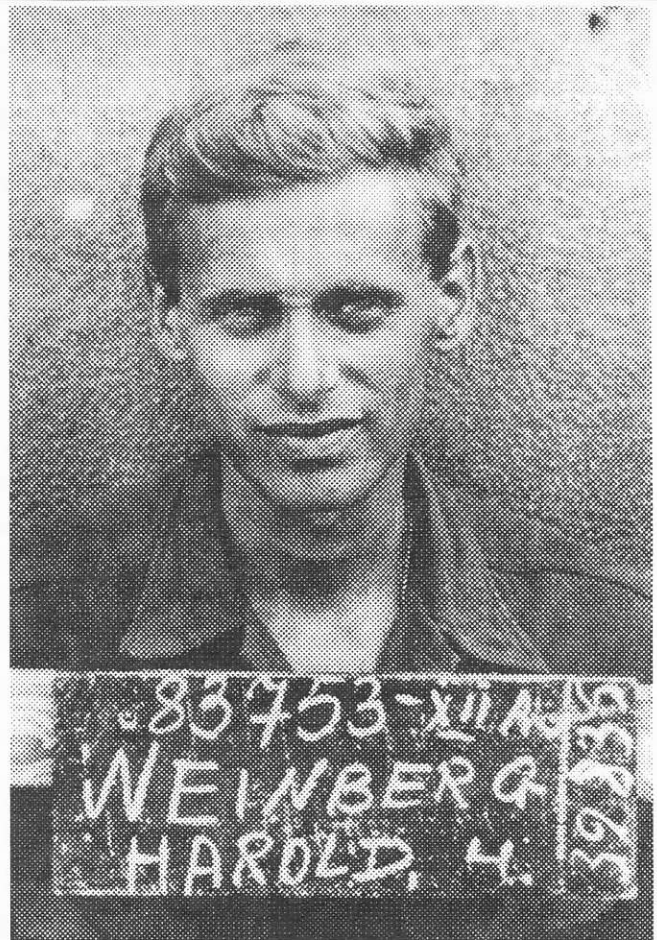
Every photograph tells a story, whether it is a portrait of an individual, a record of an event, or a view of a place. Many photographs tell fascinating stories not only through the images we see,

FROM THE
CHICAGO
JEWISH
ARCHIVES

but also through the history of the pictures themselves. One such photograph came to the Chicago Jewish Archives recently. Donated by Harold Weinberg, a longtime volunteer in the Archives, it shows him as a young U.S. army officer in a German POW camp in 1944. Harold himself had never seen the photograph until this spring, and its journey from the camp to the Archives is a remarkable one.

Harold was captured after landing at Utah Beach during the invasion of Normandy. He was sent by train to Stalag XIIA in western Germany, where he, like the other prisoners, was registered and photographed. For the next four months, he was listed as "missing in action," and the War Department had no word on his fate. Although he was permitted to send a postcard to his family in Chicago, it did not reach them until October. The photograph taken at this time shows a strong, determined face. Indeed, Harold was moved around to eleven different camps during the next year because of his reputation for resistance. During this time, the Jewish prisoners tried to hide their Jewish identity from the German officers, disguising, for example, Rosh Hashanah services as "Church of England." They saw their success as another small victory against their captors. In April 1945, as the war was winding down, Harold was released and sent home with the other prisoners.

Across the country, another American prisoner, Joseph Zetti, was being evacuated from a camp near the Polish border. The Germans were hurrying the prisoners out of the camp because of the approach of the Russian army, and during their flight one of the German officers dropped some papers. Zetti, stopping to pick them up, discovered that they included several photographs of American prisoners. He tucked them into his pocket and took them back to the States after the war. For the next 53 years he kept them, hoping someday to identify the prisoners and



return the photographs. Finally he began to publish the pictures in the newsletter of an organization called American Ex-Prisoners of War and asked for help from other veterans.

Harold was not a member of this organization and never saw the newsletter. But other veterans were determined to track down the men in the pictures. Suggestions came in regularly, but although the pictures were reprinted several times with the names of the men included, only one was identified. Finally, one member of the organization found Harold's name in a Chicago phone book, and sent it along as a suggestion to the holder of the photographs.

A letter arrived "out of the blue" in Harold's mailbox, and within a few weeks, the photograph had come home. Harold was astonished and delighted to see this picture from the past, and graciously allowed the Archives to make prints for the collection. The photograph has finished its journey; it has been added to the Archives' collection of Harold's personal papers, which include copies of his wartime diary and telegrams sent to his family. And so this photograph and its amazing odyssey will be preserved for future generations to appreciate. □

Adas Yeshurun Torah Scroll Links Past and Present

Congregation Adas Yeshurun Anshe Kanesses Israel is, like Tel Aviv, a new-old place, and now it has a new-old Torah scroll as a unique treasure of Judaica.

The scroll, constructed around the remnants of a 200-year-old scroll protected from the Nazis during the Holocaust and the Soviets during the Cold War, was dedicated on June 1, 1997 with a parade and festivities.

Remnants of the original scroll were brought to Chicago five years ago by the grandson of the original owner. Rather than bury them, as is the custom with most scrolls that have been desecrated or worn out, congregants Mr. and Mrs. Bennie Weinfeld determined to commission newly inscribed chapters to complement the fragments.

Called the "Torah of Survival," there are only four chapters remaining from the original scroll.

Adas Yeshurun congregants report that the owners of the scroll were forced to leave it in the hands of non-Jewish neighbors as they fled for their lives.

The neighbors attempted to sell the scroll at one point, but apparently found no one interested in purchasing it.

One of them finally hit upon the

idea of using the tough parchment as raw material for slippers.

He had cut up 46 of the 50 chapters before the rightful owners arrived to reclaim it.

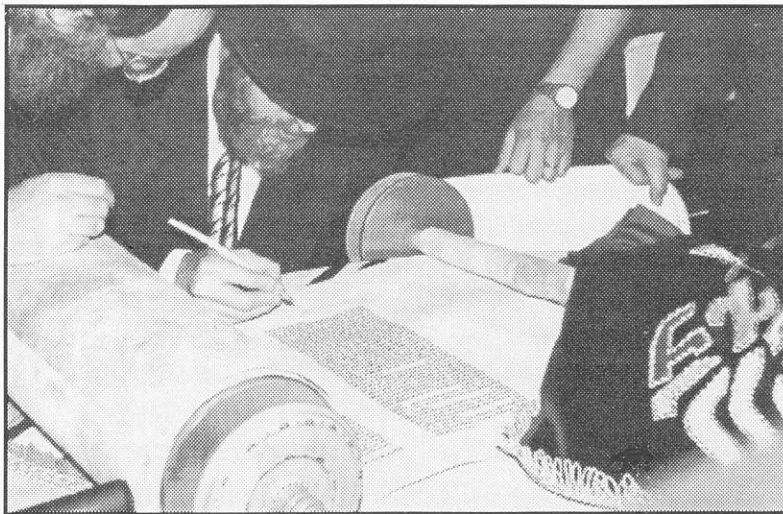
While it might have been easier merely to dispose of what was left in the customary manner, congregants saw reconstructing it as a powerful statement about the possibilities of renewing Jewish spiritual and communal life.

Sofer Yochanan Nathan, a South African native who now lives in Rogers Park, needed more than two years to complete the project.

The celebration around the dedication of the Torah scroll took place at the congregation's current home at 2949 W. Touhy.

Adas Yeshurun is a relatively young congregation, founded in West Rogers Park in 1969.

Anshe Kanesses Israel is one of Chicago's most historic shuls. Originally located in the Maxwell Street area and then moving to



Adas Yeshurun Rabbi Zev Cohen writes the next-to-last letter in the "Torah of Survival"

Lawndale at the corner of Douglas Boulevard and Homan Avenue, it was the largest synagogue in the city for many years.

As the Jewish population of Lawndale waned in the years after World War II, the congregation declined until it closed in the 1950s.

Known as the "Russische shul," it seated 3,500 people. An Orthodox synagogue, it was famous, among other reasons, for attracting some of the world's leading cantors to lead High Holiday services.

The current Adas Yeshurun Anshe Kanesses Israel, therefore, is itself a new congregation built around the remnants of an older one.

For more information, call the congregation office at (773)465-2288. □

Society Welcomes New Members

It's been a quarter of growth for the Society and we would like to welcome the many new members who have joined in the last three months.

We welcome each of them separately and all of them collectively. The job of telling the history of our community is possible only when all of us participate in it.

We are grateful for our continuing

members as well as the following new members:

Mr. & Mrs. Irving Feinman
Mr. & Mrs. Ken Hollander
Sheldon Isenberg
Harriet Gerber
Lewis
Barbara Morgenstern

Mr. & Mrs. Arnold Miller
Leonore Seelig
Temple Chai
Roberta Sal Ury
Mr. & Mrs. Harry Wolff, Jr.
Nancy Zisook

We invite everyone to participate in all of our activities. See the newsletter

and other mailings for announcements of our regular open meetings, and consider participating in projects such as our recently completed oral history project or helping in the planning process behind the projects we are preparing to undertake.

What's more, we ask you to consider giving memberships to our Society to friends, family members or former Chicagoans who may have left the city but not gotten it out of their hearts entirely. □

Oral History Excerpt:

Harriet Gerber Lewis Speaks of Philanthropy, Kokomo, and Renewing Jewishness

Harriet Gerber Lewis has lived in Chicago for most of her life and she is one of Chicago's leading Jewish philanthropists. As the leader of her family's plumbing business, Max Gerber, Inc., she is also one of the most prominent female business figures in the area.

The following excerpt is from an oral history she gave to Society Past President Norman Schwartz and Society President Walter Roth on February 6, 1993. In it, she discusses her long and varied work in raising funds for projects in the Chicago Jewish community. Her daughter Ila Lewis was on hand for the discussion as well.

Norman Schwartz: You've been very active in the Jewish community. You were on the campaign cabinet for the Jewish United Fund and were campaign chairman from 1987-1989. You also received the Julius Rosenwald award from the JUF.

Harriet Gerber Lewis: Right.

Schwartz: You are also active in the American Israel Chamber of Commerce, and you've been Chicago co-chairman for the Holocaust Memorial Museum, and also you got the Deborah award from the American Jewish Congress. Would you tell us what inspired you to get involved in these things? Why don't you just stick to the plumbing business?

Lewis: Well, I was busy raising a family when my father passed away. I really was never in the business but, you know, my mother talked me into going into the business. And, fortunately, my mother talked me into going into the business. And I worked with my brother and my husband and several very good people. I mean, it wasn't just the three of us. And there was one gentleman that was very important in my life after my father passed away, and he was our financial officer and his name was Albert Korman and he was a very special man.

His nephew is Harvey Korman – that's the television star. And then I had to prove myself, that I was really doing something more than just being a businesswoman. My father and mother were very philanthropic people. In fact, my father's family were very involved in a lot of things. And in those days it wasn't big money; it was

small money. My father did so many things that I think he set an example for me.

Schwartz: What kind of activities was he involved in?

Lewis: Well, we have a factory in Kokomo, Indiana, with a small Jewish community, and 51 years ago he built a little temple there. And it's still in existence and I'm the honorary chairperson of the temple. We had a fiftieth anniversary last year. He was involved in a lot of other things: Hebrew Theological College, he was at the Chicago Med. School, he was on the board at Temple Shalom. I mean, in his day he did a lot for his short life. So, I really got a lot from him in learning about these things, and I think it's part of growing up and part of my heritage.

Schwartz: And what was your first step into this kind of activity?

Lewis: When I was sixteen, I belonged to a group called Dorothy Kahn and that was to help children that had physical difficulties. We raised money as a group of young women. I belonged to the North Shore Auxiliary of the Chicago Children's Bureau in the late '40s, and I also belonged to Mount Sinai

It's been an ongoing thing. Once you get involved, it's very hard to get uninvolved. I've enjoyed all that I've done, and it's been a very, very special thing for me.

Service Club and got involved with Brandeis University with a group of people. We started a couples club and raised money. So, it's been an ongoing thing. I think once you get involved, it's very hard to get uninvolved. And I've enjoyed all that I've done, and it's been a very, very special thing for me.

Schwartz: Yes, I know when you worked on the campaign and we had a chance to talk to you, why we could see that you were really devoted to it, but you were also enjoying doing it.

Lewis: You shouldn't do things unless you enjoy them. The Jewish Federation is something I miss. I resigned from the board when I had surgery a few years ago, and I just have not been that involved. I'm involved with some fund raising, but not the same way as I used to be.

Schwartz: Well, but you did such a good job then, nobody can complain about that. And some of these other activities that you were in, what are some of the things that stood out? You know, the type of work that you did that really was rewarding to you?

Lewis: Well, probably the most rewarding experience was getting the Rosenwald Award because I never knew of a woman getting it. I was driving downtown to go to an AIPAC [American-Israeli Political Action Committee] meeting with my granddaughter, who is now in Israel studying to be a rabbi.

chwartz: What's her name?

Lewis: Sydney Mintz.

So... we had to stop at the Federation, and she was going to apply for a position. And I said if they ask me to do one more thing, I just can't do it. So, as we got there we went to [President/Director] Steve Nasitir's office, and I was supposed to meet William Levine, but he was ill so Marvin Stone was there in his place. And then they told me that I was to be the recipient of the Rosenwald award. And I just sat there and cried like a baby. Because, to me, that is an award that is very special...

Schwartz: You indicated that your family was active at Shaare Zedek [in Logan Square]. In those days, to some extent, women weren't given too much opportunity to participate in learning Judaism. What kind of opportunity did you get?

Lewis: I went to Sunday school, but that's all. I mean, my eldest daughter is very well versed in Judaism. All my grandchildren have been bar and bat mitvahed. But in my day, women didn't go to *cheder*, so to speak.

Schwartz: Probably not even a confirmation.

Lewis: Well, I was confirmed...

Schwartz: At Shaare Zedek?

Lewis: Yes, and the rabbi there was the rabbi that married me, too.

Schwartz: Would you spell his name?

Lewis: B-I-R-N-B-A-U-M. He was, believe it or not, he was the brother of George Burns, the movie actor...

Walter Roth: The original [family] business was primarily retail?

Lewis: Right.

Roth: And who were the customers?

Lewis: Well, they were plumbers, in those days – a lot of plumbers and some construction people.

Roth: Dealt with non-Jews as well as Jews?

Ila Lewis: With non-Jews as well as Jews.

Lewis: Mostly Polish people. It was a Polish neighborhood. My father spoke Polish fluently, and so did his parents. And my grandfather used to be downstairs watching the store, so to speak.

Roth: Did he ever run into any problems with anti-Semitism with the Poles?

Lewis: I grew up in a Polish neighborhood. Yes. Yes. Yes. I heard many remarks. I don't think...

Roth: No physical problems or violence?

Lewis: No. None that I know of.

Roth: You were talking about when you were moving to Kokomo.

Lewis: Oh, then my father bought a factory, the Kokomo Sanitary Pottery factory in Kokomo, Indiana. And, if you want to know about anti-Semitism, then I can tell you. His first party, or picnic, for his employees was at a Ku Klux Klan park. My father had an associate who was Catholic, and he had a Black driver. My father was a very defiant man, and nothing would stop him. And it was a Kluxer town, but he established a good business there.

Roth: Did the family move there?

Lewis: No. No. But we always had an apartment or a house, and then we had a farm after several years. And that's where I and my children used to go when they were small ... And, as I say, we had this temple. My father also built a Carver Center, which was for the Black people.

I. Lewis: It was a housing project. Was it housing?

Lewis: No. No. It was a community center. It was in existence until a few years ago, but they're not doing anything with it any more. But we support the temple by a nice gift and try to keep it going. It started with thirty families. I think it still has thirty families with a tremendous amount of intermarriage. It's just amazing. The president last year was a non-Jewish woman who spoke Hebrew beautifully. They started a garden

fund for youngsters to go to the UAHC camp because we're involved in Olin-Sang Ruby Union Institute, and I had given the kids – two cute youngsters – a scholarship several years ago. And it was just beautiful. I should have saved their letters because they had never had what they called a Jewish experience. And these kids just couldn't get over the fact that they were with all Jewish children and what they were learning. And the family has just moved to Indianapolis so they could be with more – so their children could be associated with more Jewish children.

I. Lewis: Even the Hebrew teacher at the temple is not Jewish.

Lewis: No. He's not.

Roth: Do you know how far that Jewish community went back in Kokomo?

Lewis: My dad started in '32. I would say 1900s.

Roth: Is there a Jewish cemetery there?

Lewis: No. No. They don't have a Jewish cemetery. See, most of the people have been buried where they originated from, and a lot of them originated from Danville, Illinois. Probably there is a section for just Jewish people. ...

Roth: When did your father decide to come back to Chicago?

Lewis: We always lived in Chicago, Walter.

Roth: I mean the factory. You said you've been – or is that a different business than what you started here in Chicago?

Lewis: Yes. Max Gerber is a retail business. We have now five factories that my father originally started. I mean, in 1932 he started Kokomo Sanitary Pottery. And then he started Delphi, a brass plant in Cleveland, which finally wound up in Indiana, and we have a large foundry there and we make faucets there. And then, I think, in 1941 he bought a factory in Woodbridge, New Jersey, and that's a china factory. And, in fact, we're enlarging it right now and making it a state-of-the-art type of operation. And then, I think, it was in 1950 that he bought a plant out in Alabama – Gadsen, Alabama. So those are the factories *he* really bought, and we've been running them ever since. ...

Schwartz: You watched the Jewish community grow. You watched the Federation's response to various problems in

the community, like the development of the Council for the Jewish Elderly.

Lewis: I was one of the fund raisers for the Lieberman home. I worked on that in raising money, and I did some interviewing for them when they were moving the people from Parkview over to Lieberman. Because, actually, when I graduated from college, I had a degree in social work.

Schwartz: Well, my wife and I moved one of the people from Parkview to Lieberman. You've seen this happen, and you've certainly been active in the Jewish community. We know that the Jewish population in this area dropped approximately 100,000 from the end of World War II to about now. We did pick up a few. We think we're at 263,000 now. If you were to make any predictions about the Jewish community, what would you have to say?

Lewis: Those of us that care, care. I would say you'll have a certain committed group of people in this community, and I really have very good feelings about the young people – a lot of the young people that are taking leadership roles. Chicago, I think, still thrives much better than most other Jewish communities.

Schwartz: You certainly have innovative programs in most areas of endeavor.

Lewis: Right. Well, we are involved in one. We started an internship for young people in the community. It's Hillel-CAYS Lewis Summer Intern Program. In fact, we're having a meeting tomorrow night, and I was just

talking to Rabbi Marker in seeing about if we could possibly fit some more people into the program.

Schwartz: Rabbi Marker is the head of Hillel-CAYS, CAYS standing for College-Age Youth Services. And what do these interns do?

Lewis: They serve all of the community through Federation agencies. In other words, one may be at the Council for the Jewish Elderly for the summer in a nine-week program. And they receive about \$1300.

Schwartz: This is all in summer time?

Lewis: Yes. And it's really become a very important part of the community. Many of the various agencies that we have are covered by these 23 young people. I'm going to try to put more money into it. I would like to have at least thirty or 31 more youngsters.

I really have very good feelings about the young people – a lot of the young people that are taking leadership roles. Chicago, I think, still thrives much better than most other Jewish communities.

Schwartz: And part of the idea is to hope that some of these will come back and become part of the –

Lewis: Well, Norman, it is not just hope anymore. They are coming back. I mean, when my

daughter and grand-daughter and I went down to talk about the program, it was something that the Federation was doing, but nobody really paid too much attention to it. Now there are so many youngsters out there who want to do communal service, and we've gotten calls: we've gotten letters: Please help get my child in and all of that. We have nothing to do with it other than the fact that I might call the gal that does the interviewing and say, "If this kid's qualified, I'd like to see him or her make it." We don't have as many young men as we have young women, but we've gotten a lot of young people back in the community now.

Schwartz: When did this start?

Lewis: About five years ago.

Schwartz: And you're already seeing some of the original interns come back to work in the community?

Lewis: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

I. Lewis: Well, it's not only working in the community, it's also having an appreciation of what Federation can do so that they have a desire to earn, you know, to fund raise, to campaign, to serve on boards.

Schwartz: So some of them may not be doing this as a vocation, but they're doing it as an avocation?

I. Lewis: Right.

Lewis: But there are quite a few that are coming out now. Each year we seen a few more. ... these kids — they are just wonderful. They really are. □